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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

September 3, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As you know, I have the privilege of representing the City of Grand Junction, Colorado which you visited on August 15, 2009. Thank you again for accepting my invitation to come to Colorado's Third Congressional District to learn about the health care innovations that have been so successful there.

Grand Junction has created a very progressive health care delivery system which has been highlighted in recent months in *The New Yorker*, the *Los Angeles Times*, on National Public Radio and in other media outlets. Academic studies have validated this system, most recently a study published earlier this month by the New America Foundation entitled, *Grand Junction: a Health Community That Works*.

Following the town hall meeting on August 15, I met with 20 community leaders who have had measurable success making low-cost, high-quality health care a reality in Grand Junction. These leaders identified certain core principles that have led to state-of-the-art accomplishments. They have offered certain key ideas to consider as we address health care policy in Washington. I would like to share several of these ideas with you.

In the 1970's, Grand Junction began the process of improving access to health care for its community. The process began with a few inspiring physicians who recognized that the delivery system was skewed to emphasize a high quantity of procedures versus high quality care. In response, they began a peer review system in which physicians within the same specialty were compared to each other. Although initially controversial, this system created a healthy competition over efficiency by physicians in the region. During that same decade, Rocky Mountain Health Plans, a non-profit HMO was developed. This inventive program began reimbursing physicians for hospital visits and house calls, and encouraged them to take a second look at the procedures they were prescribing to make sure those procedures were necessary.

During the past 30 years, Grand Junction's health care system has been able to provide health care to the majority of the population. Medicaid and Medicare recipients have access to virtually every physician in the community, including those who offer specialty

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care. These patients are eligible for coverage under Rocky Mountain Health Plans which reimburses at the same rate for all patients, whether those patients are in a public program or not. Therefore, physicians are not encouraged to discriminate because of lower reimbursement rates. This public care is delivered at a fraction of the cost of care provided in other regions. The *Dartmouth Atlas* has identified Grand Junction as the home to one of the most cost-effective Medicare delivery systems in the country.

Grand Junction has also created an efficiency model for providing indigent care. Before the term was widely used, it created what is now known as a "medical home" in the city's successful Marillac Clinic. The Marillac Clinic provides care to residents with incomes below 250 percent of the federal poverty level, residents who do not qualify for government funded programs. The uninsured have access to this privately funded clinic which provides fully integrated, patient-centered care that addresses the medical, mental health, dental, vision, and pharmacy needs of their patients at a single location. In addition, every pregnant woman in the Grand Junction community, regardless of economic status, has access to prenatal care through a program operated by a community based non-profit agency called B4Babies. This not only improves the quality of care for both mother and baby, but reduces the high-cost of delivery and care for premature, low birth-weight infants in the intensive care nursery.

The Grand Junction medical community has also provided a resourceful solution to the controversial discussion of end-of-life care. Specifically, they created a comprehensive end-of-life system of care through a non-profit, community-based hospice and palliative care organization; Hospice and Palliative Care of Western Colorado. This has resulted in fewer people dying in the hospital (less than 25%); greater use of family-centered hospice services, and significantly less cost to the community (\$6,600 less per enrollee than the national average). They also employ non-profit home health agencies which are used in coordination with the patient, the provider and the health plan. These agencies help transition patients into and out of hospital settings with well-documented and measurable quality outcomes and cost-effectiveness. Both of these are very cost efficient ways of providing affordable health care for those in need.

Another noteworthy way in which the Grand Junction medical community has been able to save money and increase efficiency is through its health information exchange. This exchange, like the rest of the community's health care components, is a non-profit organization and links primary care, specialists, hospitals, pharmacies, home health agencies and other health care providers. Doctors are able to view past procedures and results for their patients, thereby eliminating duplicative testing and procedures while improving the quality of care. It also provides collaboration among providers to determine exactly what is appropriate for their patient.

As you mentioned during your recent visit to Grand Junction, the health insurance industry is where reform needs to occur. The insurance industry has become too focused on shareholders and has forgotten its primary mission: to help those in need find quality, affordable medical coverage. I believe that every American deserves access to this level of care. No one should be denied coverage when they are most in need. Our health care

system, including providers, suppliers, payers, and the government should work together to achieve universal access to coverage.

Although our goal of providing quality, affordable health care for all Americans is clear, it must be done in a manner that does not disrupt the functioning, successful portions of the existing health coverage market. I encourage you to continue to explore the innovative health system that has been developed and nurtured through the tireless efforts and clear vision of the Grand Junction community. I hope that either as a whole or in part this system can serve as a model for national health reform.

Sincerely,



John T. Salazar
Member of Congress